

**Book review: Hensengerth, Oliver (2010).  
Regionalism in China-Vietnam relations: institution-  
building in the Greater Mekong Subregion**

Amer, Ramses

Rezension / review

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Amer, R. (2010). Book review: Hensengerth, Oliver (2010). Regionalism in China-Vietnam relations: institution-building in the Greater Mekong Subregion. [Review of the book *Regionalism in China-Vietnam relations : institution-building in the greater Mekong subregion*, by O. Hensengerth]. *ASEAS - Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 3(2), 296-300. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-361291>

**Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

**Terms of use:**


This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

hinterlassen exemplarisch einen bitteren Beigeschmack. In der nur dürftigen Auseinandersetzung mit *Transitional-Justice*-Prozessen suggeriert der Autor beispielsweise, es gäbe keine weiteren Bemühungen hinsichtlich Strafverfolgung, Vergangenheitsbewältigung oder Versöhnung seitens Timor-Lestes. Damit lässt Kingsbury einen wesentlichen Aspekt des Demokratisierungsprozesses in Timor-Leste außer Acht, was umso bedauerlicher ist, da genau dieser Prozess ja das primäre Thema des Werkes wäre.

*East Timor: The Price of Liberty* besticht vor allem durch seinen breiten Theorie-rahmen, der praxisgerecht ausgeführt wird, durch aufschlussreiche Hintergrundinformationen sowie wertvolle, weiterführende Themen- und Fragestellungen in Bezug auf die politische Zukunft Timor-Lestes. Als Einstieg in die Thematik scheint es jedoch wenig geeignet, da komplexe historische, politische und soziale Zusammenhänge oft unklar formuliert werden und sich somit nur Lesern erschließen, die mit der Thematik vertraut sind. Für Letztere wiederum fehlt dem Werk eine umfassende und tiefgehende Analyse der Entwicklungen in Timor-Leste, da entscheidende Faktoren ausgelassen oder nur unzureichend behandelt werden. Dem Kenner öffnen sich somit leider nur wenige bisher unentdeckte Pfade auf der Suche nach neuen Zugängen zur Thematik.

JULIA SCHARINGER

*Gesellschaft für Südostasienwissenschaften (SEAS), Österreich*


**Hensengerth, Oliver (2010).**  
***Regionalism in China-Vietnam Relations:***  
***Institution-building in the Greater Mekong Subregion.***  
*(Routledge Contemporary Asia Series 19).*  
*London & New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-55143-4. 212 + xi pages.*

This book by Oliver Hensengerth addresses two interlinked research topics, namely relations between China and Vietnam and collaboration within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The author aims for a comprehensive approach to the two topics and studies the importance of the GMS collaboration in the China-Vietnam relationship as well as the policies of China and Vietnam, respectively, with reference to the GMS.

Hensengerth also examines regionalism – and, more specifically, new regionalism – with special reference to “subregional” co-operation in the context of the theoretical discussion in the book. This comprehensive ambition deserves recognition.

The structure of the book is as follows: Chapter 1 is an introduction to the book (pp. 1-5). Chapter 2 is devoted to explaining “subregional” co-operation in the context of the Mekong basin (pp. 6-29). Chapter 3 is devoted to formulating an analytical framework for the GMS within the context of water co-operation, security, and international regimes (pp. 30-46). Chapter 4 is devoted to the history of Mekong co-operation and its linkage to the China-Vietnam dichotomy (pp. 47-74). Chapter 5 deals with current developments and institutional arrangements in Mekong basin co-operation (pp. 75-97). Chapter 6 looks at the GMS and foreign policy through border co-operation between China and Vietnam (pp. 98-141). Chapter 7 is a concluding chapter devoted to China’s and Vietnam’s foreign policies and “subregionalism” in the GMS (pp. 142-151). The Appendix encompasses several tables, including ‘Table A1 Institutionalization Processes in the GMS 1991-2005’ and ‘Table A2 High-level meetings between Vietnam and China, 1989-2008’ (pp. 152-177).

The strength of the book is undoubtedly the parts dealing with collaborative attempts relating to the Mekong River and the GMS. The various collaborative arrangements are addressed through their origins, developments, and current characteristics. The differences in membership, mandate, and also modes of operation between the various collaborative initiatives are outlined. The parts of the book dealing with such initiatives are comprehensive, with ‘Table A1 Institutionalization Processes in the GMS 1991-2005’ being particularly helpful.

The sections of the book dealing with the broader theoretical literature are solid and comprehensive. The author displays a good understanding of this literature and his presentation of the main features of the literature is sound. The problem is that the theoretical approach is not tied to the analysis of the empirical developments in a satisfactory way. To be more explicit, the theoretical approach is not operationalised into hypotheses that are tested against the empirical evidence. Thus the explanatory value of the theoretical approach is not assessed. This implies that the author has a solid theoretical presentation and discussion and then an empirical study with an analysis that is not explicitly linked to his theoretical approach. This is a common problem which seems to be linked to prevalent preferences in methodological

approaches in the social sciences.

The way in which the pattern of developments of the China-Vietnam relationship is addressed is uneven, with some periods and issues being addressed comprehensively while others are not addressed in a satisfactory way. The section dealing with co-operation along the China-Vietnam land border is the one that provides the best overview of any aspect of the China-Vietnam relationship. It is most coherent and inclusive in addressing the subject matter (pp. 127-139).

The most serious shortcoming relating to key dimensions in the bilateral relationship is the lack of attention paid to the territorial issues in the period since the normalisation of relations between China and Vietnam in late 1991. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the author has disregarded the existing literature specifically devoted to this issue. While Hensengerth acknowledges that the issues exist, they are addressed neither in a comprehensive nor in a coherent way in the book. Hence, the reader cannot grasp the nature of the problem, the degree to which it has affected the bilateral relations, the progress made in addressing territorial issues, and the remaining challenges. Given the fact that territorial issues have been the major cause of tension in bilateral relations since full normalisation in late 1991, they ought to have featured prominently and more coherently – but they are not.

Even more alarming is the fact that the author presents incorrect facts concerning agreements reached between the two countries relating to the Gulf of Tonkin. In 'Table A2 High-level meetings between Vietnam and China, 1989-2008' it is noted that on 25 December 2000 the two countries reached "accords on the demarcation and fisheries cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin" (p. 169). Then, in reference to Jiang Zemin's visit to Hanoi from 27 February to 1 March 2002, it is stated: "No resolve of the issue of Gulf of Tonkin (boundaries, fisheries agreement)" (p. 170). Subsequently, it is noted that on 15 June 2004 "Vietnam's National Assembly ratifies the Gulf of Tonkin agreements" (p. 171). Finally, it is indicated that on 30 June 2004: "Both deputy foreign ministers sign the demarcation agreement on the Gulf of Tonkin, regarding territorial waters, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf, plus fisheries for the gulf. Both agreements were originally concluded on 25 December 2000, but come into effect only now with the signature of 30 June 2004" (p. 172). This is contradictory. If agreements have been signed then there is a settlement of the disputes. Also, how can Vietnam ratify agreements on 15 June 2004 when the author claims that the two

countries did not sign a “demarcation agreement” until 30 June 2004?

Hensengerth appears not to have understood the process and hence misinterprets the information in the primary sources he has consulted. The correct course of events is as follows: On 25 December 2000, China and Vietnam signed the ‘Agreement on the Delimitation of the Territorial Seas, Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelves in the Gulf of Tonkin’ settling their maritime boundary disputes in the Gulf. On the same day the two countries signed an agreement on fishery co-operation in the Gulf of Tonkin. The maritime boundary agreement relating to the Gulf of Tonkin entered into force on 30 June 2004, when the two countries exchanged documents relating to the ratification of the agreement in Hanoi. The ratification process and the entry into force of the agreement were made possible by the completion of the talks on an additional protocol to the agreement on fishery co-operation. The additional protocol and the regulations on preservation and management of the living resources in the Common Fishery Zone in the Gulf of Tonkin were signed on 29 April 2004. This agreement also entered into force on 30 June 2004.<sup>1</sup> The author would have avoided the factual mistakes relating to the Gulf of Tonkin if he had thoroughly consulted the leading journal *Ocean Development and International Law*.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the stated goal of studying the linkages between collaboration in the GMS and the China-Vietnam relationship, the author does not offer an explanation as to why the Mekong River is not an issue on the official agenda for high-level talks between the two countries. He appears not to have systematically examined the Joint Statements and Joint Communiqués issued in connection with such high-level meetings. Given the ambition of the book, this aspect ought to have been addressed in both the empirical overview and in the analysis.

To summarise, ‘Regionalism in China-Vietnam Relations’ is an interesting contribution with its focus on the collaboration in the GMS linked to the China-Vietnam relationship. The strength of the book is the parts dealing with collaborative attempts relating to the Mekong River and the GMS. The way in which the author

---

1 See Nguyen H. T. & Amer, R. (2007). The Management of Vietnam’s Maritime Boundary Disputes. *Ocean Development and International Law*, 38(3), 309-310 and 312-313; and Amer, R. & Nguyen H. T. (2005). The Management of Vietnam’s Border Disputes: What Impact on Its Sovereignty and Regional Integration? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 27(3), 431 and 434.

2 This journal published two articles specifically dealing with the Gulf of Tonkin in early 2005: Zou K. (2005). The Sino-Vietnamese Agreement on Maritime Boundary Delimitation in the Gulf of Tonkin. *Ocean Development and International Law*, 36(1), 13-24; and Nguyen H. T. (2005). Maritime Delimitation and Fishery Cooperation in the Tonkin Gulf. *Ocean Development and International Law*, 36(1), 25-45.

addresses the broader China-Vietnam relationship is not as innovative. Furthermore, the way in which this relationship is presented is uneven in quality. Thus, readers are advised to consult further existing literature on China-Vietnam relations, both the sources used by the author and those that have been overlooked in his bibliography.

RAMSES AMER

*Stockholm University & Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Sweden*  
*National Institute for South China Sea Studies, China*